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Little Journeys to
the Homes of Good
Men and Great :
by Elbert Hubbard :

—
George Eliot
—

DECEMBER, 1894

New York and London: **G. D.**
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Announcement.

The publishers announce that LITTLE JOURNEYS will be published monthly and that each number will treat of recent visits made by Mr. Elbert Hubbard to the homes and haunts of various eminent persons. The subjects for the coming twelve months have been arranged as follows :

- | | |
|--------------------|----------------------|
| 1. George Eliot | 7. Victor Hugo |
| 2. Thomas Carlyle | 8. Wm. Wordsworth |
| 3. John Ruskin | 9. W. M. Thackeray |
| 4. W. E. Gladstone | 10. Charles Dickens |
| 5. J. M. W. Turner | 11. Shakespeare |
| 6. Jonathan Swift | 12. Oliver Goldsmith |

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GEORGE ELIOT

“ May I reach
That purest heaven, be to other souls
The cup of strength in some great agony,
Enkindle generous ardor, feed pure love,
Beget the smiles that have no cruelty—
Be the good presence of a good diffused,
And in diffusion ever more intense.
So shall I join the choir invisible
Whose music is the gladness of the world.”

GEORGE ELIOT.

WARWICKSHIRE supplied to the world Shakespeare. It also gave Mary Ann Evans. No one will question but that Shakespeare's is the greatest name in English literature ; and among writers living or dead, in England or out of it, no woman has ever shown us power equal to that of George Eliot in the subtle clairvoyance which divines the inmost play of passions, the experience that shows the human capacity for contradiction, and the indulgence that is merciful because it understands.

Shakespeare lived three hundred years ago. According to the records his father, in 1563, owned a certain house in Henley

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street, Stratford-on-Avon. Hence we infer that William Shakespeare was born there. And in all our knowledge of Shakespeare's early life (or later) we prefix the words, "Hence we infer."

That the man knew all sciences of his day, and had enough knowledge of each of the learned professions so that all have claimed him as their own, we know.

He evidently was acquainted with five different languages and the range of his intellect was world-wide, but where did he get this vast erudition? We do not know, and we excuse ourselves by saying that he lived three hundred years ago.

George Eliot lived—yesterday, and we know no more about her youthful days than we do of that other child of Warwickshire.

One biographer tells us that she was born in 1819, another in 1820, and neither state the day; whereas a recent writer in the *Pall Mall Budget* graciously bestows on us the useful information that "William Shakespeare was born on the 21st

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day of April, 1563, at fifteen minutes of two on a stormy morning."

Concise statements of facts are always valuable, but we have none such concerning the early life of George Eliot. There is even a shadow over her parentage, for no less an authority than the *American Cyclopaedia Annual* for 1880, boldly proclaims that she was not a foundling and, moreover, that she was not adopted by a rich retired clergyman who gave her a splendid schooling. Then the writer dives into obscurity but presently reappears and adds that he does not know where she got her education. For all of which we are very grateful.

Shakespeare left five signatures, each written in a different way, and now there is a goodly crew who spell it "Bacon."

And likewise we do not know whether it is Mary Ann Evans, Mary Anne Evans, or Marian Evans, for she herself is said to have used each form at various times.

William Winter—gentle critic, poet, scholar—tells us that the Sonnets show a

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dark spot in Shakespeare's moral record. And if I remember rightly similar things have been hinted at in sewing circles concerning George Eliot. Then they each found the dew and sunshine in London that caused the flowers of genius to blossom. The early productions of both were published anonymously, and lastly they both knew how to transmute thought into gold, for they died rich.

Lady Godiva rode through the streets of Coventry, but I walked—walked all the way from Stratford, by way of Warwick (call it Warrick, please) and Kenilworth Castle.

I stopped over night at that quaint and curious little inn just across from the castle entrance. The good landlady gave me the same apartment that was occupied by Sir Walter Scott when he came here and wrote the first chapter of *Kenilworth*.

The little room had pretty, white chintz curtains tied with blue ribbon, and similar stuff draped the mirror. The bed was

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a big canopy affair—I had to stand on a chair in order to dive off into its feathery depths—everything was very neat and clean, and the dainty linen had a sweet smell of lavender. I took one parting look out through the open window at the ivy mantled towers of the old castle, which were all sprinkled with silver by the rising moon, and then I fell into gentlest sleep.

I dreamed of playing “I-spy” through Kenilworth Castle with Shakespeare, Walter Scott, Mary Ann Evans, and a youth I used to know in boyhood by the name of Bill Hursey. We chased each other across the drawbridge, through the portcullis, down the slippery stones into the donjon keep, around the moat, and up the stone steps to the topmost turret of the towers. Finally Shakespeare was “it,” but he got mad and refused to play. Walter Scott said it was “no fair,” and Bill Hursey thrust out the knuckle of one middle finger in a very threatening way and offered to “do” the boy from Strat-

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ford. Then Mary Ann rushed in to still the tempest. There's no telling what would have happened had not the landlady just then rapped at my door and asked if I called. I awoke with a start and with the guilty feeling that I had been shouting in my sleep. I saw it was morning. "No—that is, yes; my shaving water, please."

After breakfast the landlady's boy offered to take me in his donkey cart to the birthplace of George Eliot for five shillings. He explained that the house was just seven miles north; but Balaam's express is always slow, so I concluded to walk. At Coventry a cab owner proposed to show me the house, which he declared was near Kenilworth, for twelve shillings. The advantages of seeing Kenilworth at the same time were dwelt upon at great length by cabby, but I harkened not to the voice of the siren. I got a good lunch at the hotel, and asked the innkeeper if he could tell me where George Eliot was born. He did not

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know, but said he could show me a house around the corner where a family of Eliots lived.

Then I walked on to Nuneaton. A charming walk it was; past quaint old houses, some with strawthatched roofs, others tiled—roses clambering over the doors and flowering hedge-rows white with hawthorn flowers. Occasionally I met a farmer's cart drawn by one of those great, fat, gentle shire horses that George Eliot has described so well. All spoke of peace and plenty, quiet and rest. The green fields and the flowers, the lark-song and the sunshine, the dipping willows by the stream and the arch of the old stone bridge as I approached the village—all these I had seen and known and felt before from *Mill on the Floss*.

I found the house where they say the novelist was born. A plain, whitewashed stone structure, built two hundred years ago; two stories, the upper chambers low, with gable windows; a little garden at the side bright with flowers, where sweet

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marjoram vied with onions and beets ; all spoke of humble thrift and homely cares. In front was a great chestnut tree, and in the roadway near were two ancient elms where saucy crows were building a nest.

Here, after her mother died, Mary Ann Evans was housekeeper. Little more than a child—tall, timid, and far from strong—she cooked and scrubbed and washed, and was herself the mother to brothers and sisters. Her father was a carpenter by trade and agent for a rich land owner. He was a stern man—orderly, earnest, industrious, studious. On rides about the country he would take the tall hollow-eyed girl with him, and at such times he would talk to her of the great outside world where wondrous things were done. The child toiled hard but found time to read and question, and there is always time to think. Soon she had outgrown some of her good father's beliefs, and this grieved him greatly ; so much, indeed, that her extra loving attention to his needs, in a hope to neu-

George Eliot

tralize his displeasure, only irritated him the more. And if there is soft subdued sadness in much of George Eliot's writing we can guess the reason. The onward and upward march ever means sad separation.

When Mary Ann was blossoming into womanhood her father moved over near Coventry, and here the ambitious girl first found companionship in her intellectual desires. Here she met men and women, older than herself, who were animated, earnest thinkers. They read and then they discussed, and then they spoke the things that they felt were true. Those eight years at Coventry transformed the awkward country girl into a woman of intellect and purpose. She knew somewhat of all sciences, all philosophies, and she had become a proficient scholar in German and French. How did she acquire this knowledge? How is any education acquired if not through effort prompted by desire?

She had already translated Strauss's

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Life of Jesus in a manner that was acceptable to the author, when Ralph Waldo Emerson came to Coventry to lecture. He was entertained at the same house where Miss Evans was stopping. Her brilliant conversation pleased him, and when she questioned the wisdom of a certain passage in one of his essays the gentle philosopher turned, smiled, and said that he had not seen it in that light before ; perhaps she was right.

“What is your favorite book ?” asked Emerson.

“Rousseau’s *Confessions*,” answered Mary instantly.

It was Emerson’s favorite, too ; but such honesty from a young woman ! It was queer.

Mr. Emerson never forgot Miss Evans of Coventry, and ten years after, when a zealous reviewer proclaimed her the greatest novelist in England, the sage of Concord said something that sounded like “I told you so.”

Miss Evans had made visits to London

George Eliot

from time to time with her Coventry friends. When twenty-eight years old, after one such visit to London, she came back to the country tired and weary, and wrote this most womanly wish : " My only ardent desire is to find some feminine task to discharge ; some possibility of devoting myself to some one and making that one purely and calmly happy."

But now her father was dead and her income was very scanty. She did translating, and tried the magazines with articles that generally came back respectfully declined.

Then an offer came as sub-editor of the *Westminster Review*. It was steady work and plenty of it, and this was what she desired. She went to London and lived in the household of her employer, Mr. Chapman. Here she had the opportunity of meeting many brilliant people : Carlyle, and his " Jeannie Welsh," the Martineaus, Grote, Mr. and Mrs. Mill, Huxley, Mazzini, Louis Blanc. Besides these were two young men who must

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not be left out when we sum up the influences that evolved this woman's genius.

She was attracted to Herbert Spencer at once. He was about her age and their admiration for each other was mutual. Miss Evans, writing to a friend in 1852, says: "Spencer is kind, he is delightful, and I always feel better after being with him, and we have agreed together that there is no reason why we should not see each other as often as we wish." And then later she again writes: "The bright side of my life, after the affection for my old friends, is the new and delightful friendship which I have found in Herbert Spencer. We see each other every day and in everything we enjoy a delightful comradeship. If it were not for him my life would be singularly arid."

But about this time another man appeared on the scene, and were it not for this other man, who was introduced to Miss Evans by Spencer, the author of *Synthetic Philosophy* might not now be

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spoken of in the biographical dictionaries as being "wedded to science."

It was not love at first sight, for George Henry Lewes made a decidedly unfavorable impression on Miss Evans at their first meeting. He was small, his features were insignificant, he had whiskers like an anarchist and a mouthful of crooked teeth; his personal habits were far from pleasant. It was this sort of thing, Dickens said, that caused his first wife to desert him and finally drove her into insanity.

But Lewes had a brilliant mind. He was a linguist, a scientist, a novelist, a poet, and a wit. He had written biography, philosophy, and a play. He had been a journalist, a lecturer, and even an actor. Thackeray declared that if he should see Lewes perched on a white elephant in Piccadilly he should not be in the least surprised.

After having met Miss Evans several times Mr. Lewes saw the calm depths of her mind and he asked her to correct

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proofs for him. She did so and discovered that there was merit in his work. She corrected more proofs, and when a woman begins to assist a man the danger line is being approached. Close observers noted that a change was coming over the bohemian Lewes. He had his whiskers trimmed, his hair was combed, and the bright yellow necktie had been discarded for a clean one of modest brown, and, sometimes, his boots were blacked. In July, 1854, Mr. Chapman received a letter from his sub-editor resigning her position, and Miss Evans notified some of her closest friends that hereafter she wished to be considered the wife of Mr. Lewes. She was then in her thirty-sixth year.

The couple disappeared, having gone to Germany.

Many people were shocked. Some said "we knew it all the time," and when Herbert Spencer was informed of the fact he exclaimed "Goodness me !" and said—nothing.

After six months spent in Weimar and

George Eliot

other literary centres, Mr. and Mrs. Lewes returned to England and began house-keeping at Richmond. Any one who views their old quarters there will see how very plainly and economically they were forced to live. But they worked hard, and at this time the future novelist's desire seemed only to assist her husband. That she developed the manly side of his nature none can deny. They were very happy, these two, as they wrote, and copied, and studied, and toiled.

Three years passed, and Mrs. Lewes wrote to a friend: "I am very happy; happy with the greatest happiness that life can give—the complete sympathy and affection of a man whose mind stimulates mine and keeps up in me a wholesome activity."

Mr. Lewes knew the greatness of his helpmeet. She herself did not. He urged her to write a story; she hesitated, and at last attempted it. They read the first chapter together and cried over it.

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Then she wrote more and always read her husband the chapters as they were turned off. He corrected, encouraged, and found a publisher. But why should I tell about it here? It's all in the *Brittanica*—how the gentle beauty and sympathetic insight of her work touched the hearts of great and lowly alike, and of how riches began flowing in upon her. For one book she received \$40,000, and her income after fortune smiled upon her was never less than \$10,000 a year.

Lewes was her secretary, her protector, her slave, and her inspiration. He kept at bay the public that would steal her time, and put out of her reach, at her request, all reviews, good or bad, and shielded her from the interviewer, the curiosity seeker, and the greedy financier.

The reason why she at first wrote under a *nom de plume* is plain. To the great wallowing world she was neither Miss Evans nor Mrs. Lewes, so she dropped both names as far as title pages

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were concerned and used a man's name instead—hoping better to elude the pack.

When *Adam Bede* came out a resident of Nuneaton purchased a copy and at once discovered local ear-marks. The scenes described, the flowers, the stone walls, the bridges, the barns, the people—all was Nuneaton. Who wrote it? No one knew, but it was surely some one in Nuneaton. So they picked out a Mr. Liggins, a solemn-faced preacher, who was always about to do something great, and they said "Liggins." Soon all London said "Liggins." As for Liggins, he looked wise and smiled knowingly. Then articles began to appear in the periodicals purporting to have been written by the author of *Adam Bede*. A book came out called *Adam Bede, Jr.*, and to protect her publisher, the public, and herself, George Eliot had to reveal her identity.

Many men have written good books and never tasted fame ; but few, like Liggins of Nuneaton, have become famous

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by doing nothing. It only proves that some things can be done as well as others. This breed of men has long dwelt in Warwickshire; Shakespeare had them in mind when he wrote: "There be men who do a wilful stillness entertain with purpose to be dressed in an opinion of wisdom, gravity, and profound conceit . . . "

Lord Acton in an able article in the *Nineteenth Century* makes this statement:

"George Eliot paid high for happiness with Lewes. She forfeited freedom of speech, the first place among English women, and a tomb in Westminster Abbey."

The original dedication in *Adam Bede* reads thus: "To my dear husband, George Henry Lewes, I give the manuscript of a work which would never have been written but for the happiness which his love has conferred on my life."

Lord Acton of course assumes that this book would have been written, dedication

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and all, just the same had Miss Evans never met Mr. Lewes.

Once there was a child called Romola. She said to her father one day, as she sat on his knee : “ Papa, who would take care of me—give me my bath and put me to bed nights—if you had never happened to meet Mamma ? ”

.
The days I spent in Warwickshire were very pleasant. The serene beauty of the country and the kindly courtesy of the people impressed me greatly. Having seen the scenes of George Eliot’s childhood I desired to view the place where her last days were spent. It was a fine May-day when I took the little steamer from London Bridge for Chelsea.

A bird call from the dingy brick building where Turner died and two blocks from the old home of Carlyle is Cheyne Walk—a broad avenue facing the river. The houses are old, but they have a look of gracious gentility that speak of ease and plenty. High iron fences are in

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front, but they do not shut off from view the climbing clematis and clusters of roses that gather over the windows and doors.

I stood at the gate of No. 4 Cheyne Walk and admired the pretty flowers, planted in such artistic carelessness as to beds and rows, then I rang the bell; an old pull-out affair with polished knob.

Presently a butler opened the door—a pompous, tall and awful butler, in serious black and side whiskers. He approached; came down the walk swinging a bunch of keys, looking me over as he came to see what sort of wares I had to sell.

“Did George Eliot live here?” I asked through the bars.

“Mrs. Cross lived ’ere and died ’ere, sir,” came the solemn and rebuking answer.

“I mean Mrs. Cross,” I added meekly; “I only wished to see the little garden where she worked.”

Jeemes was softened. As he unlocked the gate he said: “We ’ave many wisit-

George Eliot

ers, sir ; a great bother, sir ; still, I always knows a gentleman when I sees one. P'r'aps you would like to see the 'ouse, too, sir. The missus does not like it much but I will take 'er your card, sir."

I gave him the card and slipped a shilling into his hand as he gave me a seat in the hallway.

He disappeared upstairs and soon returned with the pleasing information that I was to be shown the whole house and garden. So I pardoned him the myth about the missus, happening to know that at that particular moment she was at Brighton, sixty miles away.

A goodly, comfortable house, four stories, well kept, and much fine old carved oak in the dining-room and hallways ; fantastic ancient balusters, and a peculiar bay-window in the second-story rear that looked out over the little garden. Off to the north could be seen the green of Kensington Gardens and wavy suggestions of Hyde Park. This was George Eliot's workshop. There was a

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table in the centre of the room and three low book-cases with pretty ornaments above. In the bay-window was the most conspicuous object in the room—a fine marble bust of Goethe. This, I was assured, had been the property of Mrs. Cross, as well as all the books and furniture in the room. In one corner was a revolving case containing a set of the Century Dictionary, which Jeemes assured me had been purchased by Mr. Cross as a present for his wife a short time before she died. This caused my faith to waver a trifle and put to flight a fine bit of literary frenzy that might have found form soon in a sonnet.

In the front parlor I saw a portrait of the former occupant that showed “the face that looked like a horse.” But that is better than to have the face of any other animal of which I know. Surely one would not want to look like a dog ! Shakespeare hated dogs, but spoke forty-eight times in his plays in terms of respect and affection for a horse. Who

George Eliot

would not resent the imputation that one's face was like that of a sheep or a goat or an ox, and much gore has been shed because men have referred to other men as asses, but a horse! God bless you, yes.

No one has ever accused George Eliot of being handsome, but this portrait tells of a woman of fifty: calm, gentle, and the strong features speak of a soul in which to confide.

At Highgate, by the side of the grave of Lewes, rests the dust of this great and loving woman. As the pilgrim enters that famous old cemetery the first imposing monument seen is a pyramid of rare, costly porphyry. As you draw near, you read this inscription:

To the memory of
ANN JEWSON CRISP,
Who departed this life
Deeply lamented Jan. 20, 1889.
Also,
Her dog, Emperor.

Beneath these tender lines is a bas-

George Eliot

relief of as vicious a looking cur as ever evaded the dog tax.

Continuing up the avenue, past this monument just noted, the kind old gardener will show you another that stands amid others much more pretentious. A small gray granite column, and on it, carved in small letters, you read :

“Of those immortal dead who live again in minds made better by their presence.”

Here rests the body of

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